

1609/5003.  
THE  
SCRIPTURAL PLAN  
OF TREATING  
PRIVATE OFFENCES  
EXPLAINED, AND ENFORCED.

A  
S E R M O N.

PREACHED FROM MATTH. xviii. 15.

B Y  
ROBERT JAFFRAY,

Minister of the Gospel at KILMARNOCK.

COL. iii. 12, 13, 14. *Put on therefore (as the elect of God, holy and beloved) bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering; forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye. And above all these things, put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness.*

KILMARNOCK:

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MDCCLXXXIV.

THE  
CONSTITUTIONAL PLAN  
OF THE  
PRIVATE OFFICES  
AND THE  
OFFICE OF THE  
SECRETARY

S. E. R. M. O. N.

W. O. R. L. T. J. A. T. E. R.





**T**HE following Sermon was composed, and preached, without the least design of ever giving it up to the view of the public. Some, however, of those who heard it, apprehending that something on the subject of which it treats, might be of considerable use to society, wished to see it in print. As the Author has never seen, nor heard of any thing on the subject, and as he is persuaded that whatever may be written upon it is far from being much known, he was at last prevailed upon to give a copy of his notes to the person for whom they are now printed.

IF the sermon has any claim upon the attention of the public, such claim must flow rather from the need there is of something on the subject itself, than from any merit in the execution of what is here offered. It will require, indeed, but little knowledge of human nature to convince us that those who have the greatest cause to attend to it, will least regard it. But whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear, a perusal of it is now put in their power. That it may be blessed for the advantage of all who shall think proper to give it a reading is the sincere desire of the Author.



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MATTH. xviii. 15.

*Moreover, if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother.*

**W**HILE the least remains of corruption continue in society its members must frequently give, and receive offence. Such offences, no doubt, must be very hurtful to the happiness of men. In the 7th verse of this chapter, accordingly, our Lord pronounces a wo upon the world on their account. They always spring from the indulgence of sin. In order, therefore, to avoid them, he enjoins us, in verses 8, 9, to

give up with the love and practice of our most darling iniquities, though dear to us as an hand, a foot, or an eye.—These offences, most commonly, take their rise from pride, which leads us to despise others as inferior to ourselves.—Against this practice, accordingly, our Lord cautions us in verse 10.—He assures us that the people of God, who are humbled as little children, have their angels in heaven, always beholding the face of his Father who is in heaven. To him the meanest of his people is a care. To promote their interest, while journeying through the waste howling wilderness of human life, and to secure them in the path which conducts to an happy immortality, is part of the employment of those ministering spirits who encircle his throne. Wantonly to sport, therefore, with the sensibility of those who enjoy the distinguished care of heaven is surely an offence which merits its high displeasure.

Nor is it any wonder that these favourites of heaven should be so honourably served: For, as we are informed in verse 11, when they were in a lost condition, the Son of Man came to save them. And will we willingly offend those towards whom, even the great God, our Saviour, has manifested such amazing kindness?

How great is the Father's care that none of those, by any discouragement whatever, be utterly lost? No one, according to the similitude in verses 12, 13, who is owner of an hundred sheep, will rejoice so much at the finding of any one of them when it has been lost, as your heavenly Father, Christians, rejoices at your reco-

very, when you have gone astray. According to the doctrine of the 14th verse, therefore, it is his will, that you beware of every thing towards one another which has any tendency to hurt your comfort here, and especially to hinder you on your way to glory. "Moreover," in order the better to avoid every thing of this kind, "If thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother." In this text, we have,

- I. A case supposed as frequently happening in the church of Christ,—Offence given by Christian brethren:—"If thy brother shall trespass against thee."
- II. A direction for Christians how to behave when such a case occurs,—*"Go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone."* And,
- III. An intimation that, in such trespasses as are here mentioned, an acknowledgment of blame, and a promise of amendment, given privately, ought to satisfy us with regard to our offending brother:—"If he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother."

In this order I shall arrange my thoughts in studying to open up the nature of this much neglected duty, contained in my text.

Secure of an unprejudiced hearing, and convinced of the importance of the subject itself, I



shall deliver my sentiments upon it with all plainness, and freedom.

That a right observation of the duty here enjoined is equally necessary for promoting the interests of religion, and maintaining the peace of society, will, by all, be readily admitted. Nor ought it to be performed merely from a principle of prudence, because it is calculated to promote our own, and our neighbour's good; but chiefly from a principle of gratitude to the Lord Jesus Christ, who came to save that which was lost.

In the exercise of faith upon him as the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth, ought we to study obedience to every part of the same law, as a rule of life prescribed by him unto his followers. Placing our undivided trust for salvation in Christ alone, and disclaiming all dependence upon our own obedience, as any way sufficient to entitle us to the favour of God, we should, under a deep impression of the supreme Authority, and unparalleled love of the gracious Saviour, study to pay proper attention to all these rules of conduct which he has given.

Faith in Christ, as the Saviour of lost sinners, is unquestionably the first, and principal duty to which gospel hearers are called. It is not, however, the only one. Among people of all descriptions, it will, I apprehend, be granted that true religion consists not in mere speculation, nor even in an empty and unoperative knowledge, and belief of the most important truths. It comprehends practice, as well as faith. Without

practice, indeed, genuine faith can neither be discovered to others, nor satisfactorily known by the person himself. It must be shown by works. Without these it is dead. A man without good works is also without true faith. In proportion as true faith predominates in the hearts, and good works flourish in the lives of those who are the members of society, in the same proportion will society be comfortable and happy. An habitually bad member of society must be, in the sight of God, a bad man. If he says he has faith, it must be dead, being alone. "Know, O vain man, that faith without works," without some proper attention to those duties which you owe to your fellow Christians, as well as those which you more immediately owe to God, "is dead \*."

While, however, the least of the saints uniformly study to promote the happiness of their brethren in society, those who have attained the most exalted degrees of grace may, sometimes, trespass against them. This doctrine is clearly taught in the

I. Branch of my text,—“If thy brother shall trespass against thee.” This you see may be done by a brother,—a brother in Christ; by the dearest friend, the best of Christians.

These trespasses, concerning which direction is here given, include not sins of a public nature. On account of these, according to the apostolic rule, the offender, however penitent, must be rebuked before all †.

\* James ii. 17,—20.

† 1 Tim. v. 20.

Whereas the trespasses here mentioned are such as may have their offence done away between the offending, and offended parties alone. Although they seem more immediately to refer to personal injuries and affronts, yet, I apprehend, they will very fairly include all those sins which are daily committed in society, by which Christians are offended with one another; and which, however, at first instance, subject them not to the censures of the church.

The range here is very wide, and considerably well known. Every one's own observation will furnish him with many trespasses of this kind. I will not need, therefore, to enlarge upon an enumeration of them. A few of these, which, I apprehend, are most common, shall suffice as a specimen of the rest.

Do not Christian brethren trespass against one another, in the way pointed out by the text, by personal injuries and affronts;—by rash anger;—by an untender use of their Christian liberty;—by speaking disrespectfully of their fellow professors;—by wavering in their Christian profession;—by vanity;—by some rare, and private instances of the sins of immoderate drinking;—profane swearing;—lying;—and by imprudent conduct of every kind?

Do they not trespass against one another,

By personal injuries and affronts? Even brethren in Christ may sometimes affront, and injure one another from ignorance of each other's character. When the disciples saw one casting



out devils in Christ's name, ignorant of his real character, they affronted him, by discharging him from continuing in that course, because he followed not with them \*.

The apostle Paul met with an injurious, and affrontive repulse from the same cause. After his conversion, he sought to join himself to the disciples at Jerufalem; and it would appear, that he was not, at first, admitted. The disciples were all afraid of him, and believed not that he was a disciple †.

How often, too, in the heat of contention, and by the working of corruption in many other different ways, do Christian brethren affront, and injure one another?

Turn your eyes to any society whatever, and injuries, and affronts, arising from this quarter, will crowd thick upon your view.

By rash anger, also, Christian brethren trespass against one another.

The very best are not without the reach of this weakness. Moses himself, notwithstanding all his meekness, was guilty of rash and hasty anger. Hear now, ye rebels, said he, in a fit of passion, to the children of Israel at the waters of Meribah; must we fetch you water out of this rock? Under the influence of the same emotion, though commanded only to speak to the rock, he smote it twice ‡. Was Moses, notwithstanding his just renown for meekness, and lowliness of heart, so much overtaken in this fault?

\* Mark ix. 38. † Acts ix. 36. ‡ Num. xx. 8,—11.

And who, then, in this world can be altogether out of danger? "Let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall."—With such sudden fallies of passion have Christian brethren just reason to be offended. When the party offending, however, is made sensible of his fault, and owns his mistake, the offended party ought to be satisfied: the best are sometimes liable to *sudden* passion; but anger *rests* only in the bosom of fools\*. In this case it changes the name, and nature of simple anger, and is turned into the heinous crime of resentment: a sin this, inconsistent with a state of forgiveness in the sight of God. Nothing can be more clear than this doctrine from the express words of him who cannot lie. "If ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses †."

Do you believe the truth of that declaration, and yet indulge resentment?—Are you not then destitute of all hopes of an interest in the pardoning mercy of God? If you are not, how miserably do you impose upon yourselves? To believe that we may indulge resentment against any one, and yet enjoy an interest in God's forgiving goodness, is certainly to disbelieve the plainest words of the faithful and true witness.

While living under the influence of an unforgiving disposition, how dare you put up the fifth petition of that prayer which Christ taught his disciples, "Forgive us our debts *as* we forgive our debtors?" What do ye suppose, ye resent-

\* Eccl. vii. 9.

† Matth. vi. 15.

ful souls, is the meaning of this petition,—*as put up by you?* Why, it is plainly this; Let all our iniquities stand marked before God, that we may be punished for them in due time. As we forgive not those who have offended us, let none of our sins against God ever be blotted out.

How unlike to the character of Christ is the person filled with resentment? What a forgiving disposition did he manifest through the whole course of his life in this world? What an amiable spirit of forgiveness, in behalf of his murderers, did he breathe forth a little before his death?—"Father forgive them, for they know not what they do," was, you know, his gracious prayer. With a temper directly the reverse of this, can you pretend to be followers of the lovely Jesus? If in this, as well as in every other part of your conduct, you are not careful to imitate his example, you are none of his. A Christian brother, indeed, may often offend us, by giving way to sudden anger, but never can he trespass against us, by indulging lasting resentment.

By an untender use of their Christian liberty, too, may Christian brethren trespass against one another. Christ has, no doubt, freed us from all ceremonial observances,—from every thing, indeed, not either directly, or consequentially contained in the moral law. We are under no proper obligation to do any thing which it does not require. We are at liberty to do every thing which it does not forbid.

If prejudices, however, against any particular course of action which we, in our own minds,



are convinced is innocent, have place in that society of which we are members, rather than give any cause of offence to our weak brother, if it can be avoided without sin, we ought by all means to avoid such a line of conduct.—How clearly and fully is this doctrine, relative to the proper use of our Christian liberty, opened up through the whole of the xivth chapter of Paul's epistle to the Romans? How many directions, worthy of our observation, are there delivered both to avoid wantonly giving, and capriciously taking offence?

At that time, there subsisted between the Jewish and Gentile converts to christianity some differences of opinion, and practice, regarding several ceremonial rites. Before the destruction of the Jewish temple, these rites, according to the different views of different Christians, might, without real blame, be either observed or forborne.

The apostle exhorts these on the one hand, who had just views of their Christian liberty, neither wantonly to offend, nor unreasonably to be offended with those who, through weakness, thought themselves still bound to pay some attention to the ceremonial law. He warns those, on the other hand, who thought themselves obliged to observe the rites of the Old-Testament dispensation, not to take offence at the freedoms of such as saw themselves delivered from that burdensome yoke of ceremonies.

Happy were it for society, should its members, in similar circumstances, behave conformably to the spirit of this direction.—Never, however,

ought we to do any thing which has a tendency to encourage such opinions, or practices, as appear to us to be founded in prejudice, or to flow from weakness. Rather ought we to take every proper mean for their removal.—Neither ought we to treat the innocent prejudices of our brethren with contempt; nor to strengthen them, by ill-timed and unnecessary compliances. From each of these extremes the apostle Paul kept himself at an equal distance. How far was he from treating the weaknesses, and scruples of his Christian brethren with contempt? “If meat,” says he, “make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth, lest I make my brother to offend \*.” At the same time, he was equally cautious of doing or saying any thing, calculated to continue such prejudices. Accordingly, we hear him directing others to eat whatsoever was sold in the shambles, asking no question for conscience sake †.

By speaking disrespectfully of their fellow professors, Christian brethren often give just ground of offence. How prevalent a trespass this? How hurtful to the happiness of society? How contrary to that respect which we owe to one another? To every one there is due a certain share of honour. Honour all men, is the express command of God ‡. With some degree of respect, therefore, ought we to treat every character. As there is no character in this world, however good, free from some blemishes which

\* 1 Cor. viii. 13.

† 1 Cor. x. 25.

‡ 1 Pet. ii. 17.

require to be covered with the mantle of love; so there is none, however bad, totally destitute of something, less or more, praise worthy, which ought to be respected, and commended. So far, however, are the generality, even of professing Christians, from paying due regard to what appears worthy of commendation in the character upon the whole but indifferent, that they too often fix wholly upon any little defect in the character which is on the whole amiable, and good.—Whenever their fellow professor happens to offend them, forgetting all the excellencies in his character, they dwell only on its blemishes; and, pleased to contemplate the worst side of things, turn from viewing that which should excite esteem, and approbation.

How often do Christian brethren trespass against one another, by wavering in their Christian profession? In all religious societies such instability never fails to offend the sensible and tender Christian. Every good man, when he acts in character, is not only steadfast in his own adherence to all the different parts of divine truth, so far as he knows it, but he is also grieved and offended, when he sees others wavering in their attachment to these truths, of whose inestimable value he is so deeply convinced. Ye giddy professors of religion, who sometimes run to an extreme in point of strictness, excluding the duties of Christian charity, and mutual forbearance, and again fall back to the other extreme of laxness, giving way to downright indifference about religion, are ye not, by this course, guilty of giving



just cause of offence? "Be not carried about  
 "with divers and strange doctrines: for it is a  
 "good thing that the heart be established with  
 "grace \*."

By vanity, too, Christian brethren very often offend. By many different ways are trespasses committed on this quarter. It might seem improper, in this place, very particular to specify them. Nor indeed is it any way necessary. Every one recollects many instances in which he has been hurt by the vanity of others. Happy would it be for society, were we equally sensible when it appears in our own conduct.

Suffice it to say in general, that whenever any one gives himself airs of importance superior to his worth and station, he gives offence by the appearance of vanity.

By some rare and private instances of the sin of drunkenness may Christian brethren also trespass against one another.

Persons, indeed, habitually and openly drunk are as much the objects of church censure, as sinners of any other description. Drunkards are among the number of those who shall not inherit the kingdom of God †. When, however, the person has been but once, or seldom overtaken in this fault, if it has not been publicly known, the offence, I apprehend, according to the doctrine of my text, may be privately removed.—When any one, indeed, spends that time which ought to be employed in his proper

\* Heb. xiii. 9.

† 1 Cor. vi. 10.

business, and that money which ought to be laid out for the good of his family, among the companies of the idle, unnecessarily frequenting the tavern, though no effects of intoxication should ever appear, he gives just ground of offence to every man of sober reason, and good sense.—If, however, upon a private admonition, he refrains from this pernicious course of conduct, the offended person ought to rest satisfied:—He has gained his brother.—But should he, after repeated admonitions, go on in the commission of this destructive vice, he renders himself as really, though, perhaps, not in such an high degree, liable to church censure, as the person habitually and deeply intoxicated.

By profane swearing, too, in some rare and private instances, may Christian brethren trespass against one another. Habitually profane swearers, indeed, come not under the description given of those mentioned in my text. They may, no doubt, bear the Christian name, but they have no claim, less or more, to the Christian character. Real Christians, however, as we find in the case of Peter, may, at least once in their life-time, when under the influence of some strong temptation, fall even into the sin of profane swearing.—Heinous as this sin is, if it has been committed in private, upon evidence of real repentance in the offending person, the offence also may be removed without incurring a public censure. The same thing may be said, of what are called minced oaths, and whatever in conversation is more than yea, or nay. All this cometh of

evil \*. It must, therefore, give just ground of offence.—When, however, the offender, privately admonished to refrain from such a wicked practice, complies with the admonition, as our brother is gained, we ought to be satisfied.

By some rare and private instances of the sin of lying, I said also, Christian brethren may trespass against one another. Habitual liars, no doubt, as well as habitual swearers, must be excluded from the number of real Christians.—All liars are among the unhappy number who shall have their part in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone †. My text, therefore, respects not these who are habitually and voluntarily guilty of this crime. From some instances, however, in which the scripture saints, such as, Abraham ‡, Isaac ||, Jacob §, David \*\*, and others, were guilty of this sin, it appears, too, that it is really one of those sins into which Christian brethren may fall. If this crime has been but seldom, and privately committed, the offence, according to the doctrine of my text, may be also privately done away.—Here, too, there occurs a very necessary and clear distinction, between a lie made with a design to deceive, and a simple falsehood, which may proceed either from defect of memory, or misinformation. In instances of this last kind, an acknowledgment, either that we have been misinformed, or that

\* Matth. v. 37.  
 || Gen. xxvi. 7.  
 xxvii. 8,—10.

† Rev. xxi. 8.  
 § Gen. xxvii. 19.

‡ Gen. xx.  
 \* 1 Sam.



the fact has escaped our memory, should give satisfaction. As no man's memory is perfect, whenever a falsehood, told by any one, can be imputed to the defect of that faculty, charity will dispose us to make a proper, and candid allowance. A propensity to judge unfavourably of the conduct of others,—To view every thing in the worst light, is always an infallible sign of a very bad heart. An extensive acquaintance, indeed, with the person's general character, and a conviction that it is really bad, may lead us to form no very favourable opinion of some of his actions which excite suspicion. This, however, differs widely from an eagerness always to believe the worst of the actions of others. Whence arises such a practice as this? Is it not from a conviction in those who are guilty of it, that they themselves, in a similar situation, would have been equally criminal, as they judge the person to have been whose conduct they blame? Daily observation, accordingly, clearly shews, that people are always most ready to suspect others as guilty of those particular sins to which they themselves are most addicted.

Some, indeed, in censuring others, with an unhallowed eye, attempt to penetrate the secret recesses of the soul, and assume a prerogative which can only belong to Him before whom hell, and destruction are without a covering. They rest not with the outward conduct, which is all that properly falls under the observation of men, but sit judges also upon their neighbour's heart, and can tell him when he is speaking, or acting

contrary to his conscience; which, in their view of the matter, no doubt, he must always be doing when he speaks, or acts contrary to their inclination. To judge of our neighbour's conscience is certainly going beyond the limits prescribed to human sagacity. It is God's province, alone, to search the hearts, and try the reins of the children of men \*.

Christian brethren, I said, in the last place, may trespass against one another, by imprudent conduct of every kind.—There are many things in their own nature lawful, and yet on certain occasions, and for certain characters inexpedient. “All things,” says the apostle, “are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient †.” Into these inexpedient, or imprudent things, Christian brethren may sometimes fall through mere inadvertency. In order to forbear them for the future, they need only to be convinced of their impropriety.

If thy brother shall trespass against thee in any of these ways now mentioned, or by any other of the trespasses contained in the text, retain not resentment against him in thine heart, but go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone. This direction, you see, is the

II. Branch of my text. Go and tell him between thee and him alone that you really are offended with his conduct,—tell in what particular instance he has given you offence,—study to con-

\* Jer. xvii. 10.

† 1 Cor. x. 23.

vince him of his offence.—Let all this be done with meekness,—with love,—and after earnest prayer to God in his behalf.

“ Go and tell him between thee and him alone,”

That you really are offended with his conduct. Whisper not around your offence amongst others; but go directly, and inform the offending person himself of what you judge to have been wrong in his behaviour. This was the honest, and honourable course pursued by Paul when he was offended with Peter’s dissimulation. “ But when Peter was come to Antioch,” says he, “ I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed. For before that certain came from James, he did eat with the Gentiles; but when they were come, he withdrew, and separated himself, fearing them who were of the circumcision. And the other Jews dissembled likewise with him; insomuch that Barnabas also was carried away with their dissimulation. But when I saw that they walked not uprightly, according to the truth of the gospel, I said unto Peter, before them all, If thou, being a Jew, livest after the manner of the Gentiles, and not as do the Jews, why compellest thou the Gentiles to live as do the Jews \*?” Here you see with what honesty, and plainness, the apostle Paul lays the offensive part of Peter’s conduct before him, as well as that of the other Jews who had been guilty of the same dissimula-

\* Gal. ii. 11,—14.



tion. He addresses Peter, whose fault, from his sacred office, was most highly aggravated, in the presence of the other offenders, and candidly expostulates with him on account of his improper conduct. Go ye, Christians, and do likewise. Boldly and honestly tell your offending brother, that you yourselves have been offended with his conduct. Pretend not, as many do, that others only are the persons offended, and that it is only on account of the offence which they have taken, that you have thought proper to lay the matter before him. This conduct may very readily prevent your offending brother from taking the same course for your satisfaction, that he would have done, had he known that you yourselves were the persons offended. Nor is it enough merely to tell him, in general, that you are offended.

You ought, between you and him alone, to tell him in what particular instance he has given the offence. Without this, you neither put him on a way to give you any satisfaction for the past, nor to make any amendment for the future. Beware of only pointing out to him some part of his conduct with which you are but slightly offended, while something, in your own apprehension, at least, of greater moment, is left concealed. This plan of procedure is often adopted from timidity, or false prudence; but never can it produce any good effect: for while you deal with your offending brother in this way, he may, through mere ignorance, still go on in that course of conduct with which you are most displeased, while, at farthest, he can be expected only to re-

frain from that part of it with which you were but a little offended. If you are not plain, and explicit, in specifying the precise instance of your brother's conduct, at which you have taken offence, I ask your own cool, and deliberate judgment, if you have any reason to be displeased while he does not amend? Nor ought you to think that you have fully discharged your duty to your offending brother, when you have particularly specified the instances of his offence.

You must also study to convince him of it. It is not enough simply to tell him that you are offended with this, or that particular action. You may take offence when there is none given. And who is obliged to satisfy your caprice? You must shew your offending brother against what part of the divine rule he has trespassed. Your thoughts, and judgment, are not the rule of your brother's conduct. It is to no purpose to entertain him with your own thoughts of his conduct. With these, he has very little concern. You must shew him what you take to be the mind of the Spirit of God concerning it, as revealed in his word. "To the law, and to the testimony;" if your admonitions, and remonstrances, "are not spoken according to this word," they are unworthy of any regard \*.

Much pains ought always to be taken for the conviction of our offending brother. My text might be literally rendered, "If thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and convince him of his

\* Isa. viii. 20.

“ fault ; ”—that is, study by all means to do it. Some, indeed, are so hardened, or stupid, and others so full of self-conceit, as not to admit conviction. Nay, there are not wanting some, of such peculiarly unhappy tempers, that, let them be dealt with, regarding any part of their offensive conduct, in ever such a gentle, and candid manner, so far are they from taking it kindly, and lying open to conviction, that they upbraid, with every term of reproach, the person who has honesty, and friendship enough, in the most tender manner, to remind them of their mistakes. It must be admitted, indeed, that there is but small encouragement to attempt the conviction of people of this character. Still, however, every proper mean for producing it should be carefully tried.

Is it the duty of the party offended to study the conviction of those who have acted wrong? Then certainly it must be no less the duty of the person who gives the offence, with mildness, and gratitude, to listen to the remonstrances of those by whom he is privately, and honestly admonished. What an excellent pattern of this is set before us by the Psalmist David? “ Let the righteous,” says he, “ smite me, it shall be a kindness; and let him reprove me, it shall be an excellent oil, which shall not break my head: for yet my prayer also shall be in their calamities \*.” How often is it owing to the backwardness of offenders to receive the most private, and cautious hint of their improper conduct, that

\* Psal. cxli. 5.



even men of good sense, and real religion, are so averse to deal with them about matters of offence? How many are there who hate him that rebuketh in the gate, and who abhor him that speaketh uprightly \*? So outrageous, even when dealt with in the softest manner, do they sometimes become, that to proceed in an attempt to convince them, would be only to throw pearls before swine †. Never, however, while there is the smallest hope of success, should we desist from endeavouring the conviction of our offending brother. For this purpose should we lay before him the several aggravations of his offence. We should study to shew him that his conduct has been inconsistent with that gravity, sincerity, meekness, or charity which become the disciple of Christ; that, by it, he has dishonoured his Saviour, hurt the interest of religion, and blunted his confidence at a throne of grace ‡.

In society mutual offences, too, may often occur. A person may sometimes expostulate about some impropriety of conduct with one to whom some of his own actions have given offence. In that case prudence, and good sense, would generally direct the person with whom the expostulation is first begun, for that time, at least, not to mention the offence which he himself has received. This would have too much the look of retaliation. Should it, however, on any occasion, seem proper to do it, it ought, then especially, to be done with peculiar mildness, and caution, and not till

\* Amos v. 10.

† Matth. vii. 6.

‡ Psal. lxi. 18.

after he has frankly acknowledged what is blameworthy in his own conduct, and promised amendment. Upon this both parties ought to confess their faults one to another \*, and exchange mutual forgiveness. Should any of the parties, however, prove obstinate, and refuse either to acknowledge his own fault, or to forgive his brother, the plan of procedure with regard to him is pointed out in the following context. The other party ought to take with him one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established; and if he shall neglect to hear them it ought to be told to the church:—the matter should be laid before a church judicatory, where it ought to be treated in that way which seems most conformable to the rule of Christ's word, and best calculated to answer the end of general edification †.

In all the foregoing steps of dealing with our offending brother we ought to conduct ourselves in the *spirit of meekness*. Should we, in such instances, behave in a proud, haughty, ill-natured, and insolent manner, we may well put our offending brother in a passion, and steel him against conviction; but never can such conduct have any tendency to reclaim him. Let any of us ask our own hearts if we, though guilty of some very considerable impropriety of conduct, would choose to be reminded of it, with insolence, and ill-nature? Would we not rather wish to be treated with gentleness and love? “Whatsoever

\* James v. 16.

† 1 Cor. xiv. 26.

“ ye would then that men should do unto you, do  
 “ ye even so unto them : for this is the law, and  
 “ the prophets †. Wherefore brethren, if a man  
 “ be overtaken in a fault, ye who are spiritual, re-  
 “ store such an one in the spirit of meekness; con-  
 “ sidering thyself, lest thou also be tempted †.”

As our endeavours to reclaim those who have gone astray ought to be mixed with meekness,

So ought they also to *spring from love*.—From real love to his person ought we always to tell our offending brother his fault. This will give a certain softness, and tenderness to the manner of our expostulation with him, which nothing but the greatest stupidity, or the highest pride, will be able to resist. How different will be the manner of our dealing with our offending brother, when prompted to it by love, from that which arises from our own pride, and peevish humour? If we would evidence the reality of our love to our brother, we must do it by private, and tender expostulations with him about every particular of his improper conduct, with which we are acquainted. “ Thou shalt not hate thy brother in  
 “ thine heart: thou shalt in any wise rebuke  
 “ thy neighbour, and not suffer sin upon him ||.”  
 “ He that rebuketh a man, afterwards shall find  
 “ more favour than he that flattereth with the  
 “ tongue §.”

Our dealing with our offending brother in order to bring him to a proper sense of his sin,

† Matth. vii. 12.  
 § Prov. xxviii. 23.

‡ Gal. vi. 1.

|| Lev. xix. 17.



should, I said in the last place, follow earnest prayer to God in his behalf. Have you professed great grief for the faults of others, which you have never spread before the throne of grace, in the way of praying for their forgiveness? And can you, in this course, justify yourselves to God, and your own consciences? Do you remain unconcerned about your offending brother's good? Then, indeed, may you exert much ill-nature against what *you reckon* faulty in his conduct. But you can shew no true zeal against sin. Were we to come to tell our offending brother his fault, after praying to God in his behalf, what encouragement might we have to hope that he would hear us,—that we should gain our brother? Might we not expect that he would both acknowledge what was blamable in his conduct, and promise amendment? And this, according to the

III. Thing included in my text, ought, in all sins of a private nature, to give full satisfaction. The trespasses here mentioned, I apprehend, will include sins of the highest, as well as of the lowest degree of guilt. They seem to be no otherwise limited than only to those sins which are not, either in their own nature, or by circumstances attending them, exposed to the eye of the public. This limitation appears evidently suggested in their being pointed out as committed only against an individual. “If *thy* brother shall trespass against *thee*.” Whenever our brother gives us sufficient cause to be offended with his conduct, although his sin includes no injury, nor affront, which ter-

minate in our own persons, he may be justly said to trespass against us. When we feel uneasy on his account, his guilt eventually hurts our peace of mind, although nothing should have been more remote from our brother's design than to do us any harm. Now, Christian, art thou offended by thy brother's conduct? Hast thou spoken to him privately? Is he ready, privately, to acknowledge his fault, and promise amendment? And is not this sufficient for your satisfaction?

When a Christian brother trespasses against many by a public sin, that society, against which he has trespassed, has also a right to receive satisfaction, which, I apprehend, can be given them only by one of two ways. Either by the offending person's appearance, to receive the censure judged adequate to his offence, in the presence of the society offended; or if his crime, though, in some measure, public, is not thought to merit a public censure, by the censure's being inflicted only in presence of the session, and intimated publicly to the whole society against which he has trespassed. When the sin is of a public nature, the satisfaction, that it may be as extensive as the offence, must, one way or other, be also public. If the sin has been committed in private, private satisfaction, as being fully commensurate to the offence, is all that is necessary. This, if I mistake not, is the very spirit of my text. "Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee,"—that is, if he shall listen to thy remon-

frances, if he shall acknowledge his fault, and resolve to avoid it for the future, "thou hast gained thy brother,"—thou hast gained him from the error of his way, and secured a place in his friendship. And ought not that to suffice? Whoever requires more than this must be influenced by some other spirit than the Spirit of God, must have some other end in view than the advancement of God's glory.

After what you have heard, brethren, need I adduce any arguments for enforcing the duty here enjoined? Is it not a command of Christ? And what could you seek more to engage your observation of it? Whatever is commanded by Christ, must be equally well calculated to advance God's glory, and promote our own good. Can you neglect any thing which answers such a noble, and comfortable end? How slow are we in understanding, and how averse to perform our duty, when it is understood? How much neglected, in particular, the duty in the text? How heinous the neglect? A proper observation of it is the only way for bringing our offended brother to listen to our remonstrances:—It is the only way of dealing with him, in cases of private offence, on which we are warranted to expect the divine blessing:—It is a noble mean for maintaining, and promoting mutual love among Christians.—The man who neglects it acts contrary to the character of the real Christian,—contrary indeed to the character of a man of good sense.

Is not this private way of dealing with our offending brother here enjoined, the only way for



bringing him to listen to our remonstrances? Will not our own hearts, if they are allowed to speak the truth, tell every one of us that we would listen with patience to a private remonstrance against any blamable part of our conduct, especially if it seemed to flow from love, when we would take it highly amiss were the charge brought against us, all at once, in public? Do your own hearts tell you that this private way of dealing about private offences would be most acceptable to you? And are you not fully warranted to conclude that it must also be most agreeable to others? If you know your own hearts you know those of all mankind. Human nature, in different persons, may be a little differently modified; but, in its great outlines, it is in all the same. "As in water face answereth to face, so doth the heart of man to man †." Do you neglect, then, this way of dealing with these who have trespassed against you? And can you have any reason to hope that they will listen to any of your admonitions? Would you take it kindly from others, were they to bring forth your private offences, so as to hurt your character in the eyes of these around, while they had never told you your fault between them and you alone? You certainly would not. Have not others the same feelings with yourselves?

On no other way of dealing with our offending brother, in cases of private faults, than the one prescribed in my text, are we warranted to expect

† Prov. xxvii. 19.

the divine blessing. I appeal to your own consciences, Can you expect the blessing of God on any part of your conduct in which you oppose the injunctions of heaven? This, I am confident, none of you will pretend. But when we take any other course with our offending brother, whose fault deserves not public censure, than the one here enjoined, we are out of the way of God's appointment, and, consequently, have no reason to expect his blessing. Have you then any regard to the blessing of God on your conduct? Evidence it, among other parts of your duty, by paying due attention to the command in my text. Without this your regard to the blessing of God will ly only in words:—that is, it will be only the regard of an hypocrite.

What a noble mean for maintaining, and promoting love among Christians would be a proper observation of the command in the text? Must he not be a man of a most unhappy disposition indeed, who loves not the person who manifests so much friendship to him, by meekly, and tenderly, in a private manner, laying before him any part of his conduct which he judges amiss: especially when he gives reasons for his judgment from the word of God? By such free, and friendly dealing with one another, what jealousies, heart-burnings, evil surmizes, animosities, and divisions in society, might be prevented? What love, and harmony would prevail? Were we in this private, and friendly manner to examine the offence of our offending brother, would we not, on many occasions, find, that we had been alto-

gether misinformed concerning him,—that our dissatisfaction flowed entirely from a misapprehension of the true state of the matter? For the most part, at least, we would find that we had viewed the offence in a more heinous light than, upon such an inquiry, we would discover it to bear. By which means an unjust estimation of our brother's character would either have no place, or be, at least, in a good measure corrected.

Are you not convinced that it is your duty to do all in your power for promoting the spread, and continuance of true Christian love? And will you neglect the duty enjoined in my text, the observation of which is so well calculated for maintaining, and promoting this love? With what tenderness, and friendship ought Christians to deal with one another in matters of offence? It is the offence of a *brother*. “If thy *brother* shall “trespass against thee.” What man of sense, and humanity, not to mention religion, would deal harshly with a *brother*? Can you live at variance on earth with any one, with whom, you have any evidence to hope, you may live in eternal friendship in heaven? Were the saints above capable of shame, might they not blush to meet one another in heaven, after such uncharitable thoughts, and harsh censures of one another on earth? How might many of these be avoided by this private way of dealing with one another, in matters of offence, pointed out in my text?

The man who habitually, and voluntarily neglects the course of conduct here prescribed acts contrary to the character of the real Christian,



Can the real Christian live in the allowed neglect of any thing which has a tendency to advance the glory of God? Is it not his prevailing character, whatever he does, to do all to the glory of God? Is not the right observation of this duty well calculated for promoting this end, by advancing the interests of peace, and love in society? Is not this one of those ways in which the real Christian causes his light so to shine before men, that they, seeing his good works, may glorify his Father who is in heaven?

Can the real Christian live habitually neglectful of any known command of Christ? What a plain, and express command of Christ are the words of my text? Can ye neglect it, and call yourselves Christians? How inconsistent is your practice with your profession? But if you are resolved still to pay no attention to it,—act consistently,—disclaim the name of Christians. Should you, in the abundance of your vanity, arrogate this honourable name to yourselves, while you live neglectful of the duty in my text, you have certainly no title to it from others.

The man, in a word, who lives neglectful of the duty in my text acts contrary to the character of a man of good sense. Will not good sense direct every one possessed of it to avoid every thing which has a tendency to hurt his own, and other's peace? How unhappy in himself; how unhappy to others, the man who lives under the influence of resentment against any one, while he will not deal privately with the offending person for having this resentment removed? Is he not

an object of pity, as well as of disapprobation? Is he not much more unhappy to himself than he can possibly be to any one else? What a train of uneasy thoughts continually passes through his mind? Is he not a prey to hatred, malice, envy, and all these other tormenting passions, which come to their perfection only in hell? Where is the unhappy man who, by the indulgence of resentment, is a prey to all these corroding passions? Let us drop over him the tear of compassion. Let us lift up our prayer to God in his behalf, that he may be plucked out of the pit of destruction, as a brand out of the burning.

How great the infatuation of men in adding, by their untender conduct towards one another, to the load of common miseries, which are unavoidable by human nature, in its present suffering state? Ought we not rather to do all in our power to make life to ourselves, and to one another, as easy as possible? We are all partakers of the same common nature, have the same affections, and the same feelings. If we are real Christians, we are members of the same body, members one of another †: we are brethren of Christ ‡, and to one another §. Should we not therefore live as brethren §? Should we not deal kindly and truly with one another?

What shall we then think of the man who, without using any means to convince his brother of what he imagines worthy of blame in his opi-

† Rom. xii. 5.  
§ 1 Pet. iii. 8.

‡ Heb. ii. 11.

|| Rom. viii. 29.

nions, or practice, can yet harbour in his breast a lasting, and unrelenting resentment? Is it possible to clear such an one from the imputation of living either in the ignorance, or in the contempt of Christ's direction in my text? By all means, Christians, avoid such conduct. "For  
 " where envy and strife is, there is confusion, and  
 " every evil work. But the wisdom which is  
 " from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle,  
 " and easy to be intreated, full of mercy, and  
 " good fruits, without partiality, and without  
 " hypocrisy †." "Brethren, be not children in  
 " understanding: howbeit, in malice be ye chil-  
 " dren, but in understanding be men ‡."

† James iii. 16, 17.

‡ 1 Cor. xiv. 20.

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 more, or rather, can yet persist in his present  
 a selfish and unchristian retention? Is it  
 possible to clear such an error from the inspiration  
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